

## North Carolina Officials Support Women in Law Enforcement

April 17, 2023 By Lauryn Lovett

CHAPEL HILL, NC – Women make up less than 13% of police officers in the country, according to Pew Trust. It's the same percentage in North Carolina, which is why some officials are finding ways to encourage more women to enter the field.

On April 12, U.S. Reps. Deborah Ross (D-N.C. 2nd) and Rep. Valerie Foushee (D-N.C. 4th) visited Durham to advocate for the Supporting Women With Career Opportunities in Policing Services or Supporting Women COPS Act. If passed, the legislation will provide incentives for women to go into public service, revise hiring practices, and establish ways to retain and advance female officers.

The Act also calls for building a federal task force which would create policy recommendations. Departments that take these considerations could see an increase in funding.

The representatives say they hope to better reflect the communities and increase representation. In the Triangle, there are several female police chiefs – Estrella Patterson in Raleigh, Patrice Andrews in Durham, and Celisa Lehew in Chapel Hill.

And in Chapel Hill, the police department is restarting the Girls Empowered Motivated Spectacular (GEMS) initiative. The six-week program hosts a series of activities for young women ages 14 to 19 to explore potential careers in community safety and local government.

Sergeant Prairie Osborne, who is working with the program, says it's important for young women to have this experience because "there's not always a lot of opportunity to see people who look like me in a career that I might be interested in. When I grew up in the western part of the state, there weren't female law enforcement officers."

The application closes on April 30 and the program starts on May 11.